

**Remarks at a Reception for Senator Arlen Specter in Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania**

September 15, 2009

Thank you so much, everybody. Please have a seat. Thank you. It was, first of all, wonderful to meet all of you as we were taking pictures. And I want to say that I am so pleased to be here not only because of Arlen's outstanding track record, but because, like me, he married up in life. [*Laughter*] We are both lawyers. We both appreciate the Constitution. We're both fighters, and sometimes people count us out. So although we come from different parts of the country, we have this bond, this thread. And as Arlen, I think, has mentioned, one of the most important bonds is, we're basically a couple of Kansas kids who somehow got displaced—[*laughter*—him in Philadelphia and me in Honolulu.

I want to make sure that I give a word of thanks to Bob Casey, who is one of the finest people I know, has just been a great friend to me—and his entire family, obviously, is just legendary here in Pennsylvania. So please give Bob Casey a big round of applause. And I want to thank David Cohen for being such a great supporter of mine, a great supporter of Arlen's. And I suspect that David is in the middle of just about every civic activity that takes place in Philadelphia, and he does it with just a lot of class and always a smile on his face. So thank you, David, for all your help.

You know, if you'd think back to where we were 8 months ago, it's hard to imagine. When I was sworn into office, we were in the midst of the worst recession since the Great Depression. And a lot of economists—both left and right—thought that we might be plunging into a great depression. We were shedding 700,000 jobs a month. Credit was almost entirely frozen. Not only could you not get a bank loan or a student loan or a home loan, but banks weren't lending money to each other.

And at that point, I think there was a sense that in the absence of effective Government action, we could end up being in a real disaster. And so we determined that we had to move boldly and swiftly to turn this around. And we put together—after consulting with the best economists in the country from all walks of life and all parties, we decided that we needed to put together a recovery package that would have a variety of elements. It would provide tax cuts to businesses and individuals. It would provide support for States that were seeing their budgets plummet. It would provide help to individuals who were being laid off. And it would start building the kind of infrastructure that would move America into the 21st century.

And there's been a little bit of a selective memory about—a little historical revisionism—about the situation that we were in. But even then, even as scared as people were, there were some in Washington who decided that this is a political opportunity, this is ideological, that we should fight this and perpetuate the kind of gridlock that has caused us so many problems in the past.

I'm pleased that I had a partner in Arlen Specter in getting that recovery package done, because it displayed all the traits that I think makes him such an exceptional Senator. Obviously, the first, independence; he is somebody who has always fought for the people who sent him to Washington and not just party; a terrific intellect, being able to follow all the arguments about how to structure a plan that had the best chance of being effective; toughness,

being able to put up with a awful lot of grief in the midst of what was a eventually pretty acrimonious debate; and integrity, willingness to stand for what he believed in.

Because of Arlen, we were able to get that recovery package passed. Because the recovery package passed, we are now seeing that this economy has pulled itself back from the brink. The financial markets are working again. The stock market has recovered a lot of its value, which means people's 401(k)s have recovered a lot of their value. Banks aren't lending as much as we'd like, but at least things are functioning. We saw this month, for the first time in 3 years, manufacturing actually ticking up, consumer confidence is up. We are not out of the woods, but we've pulled back from the abyss.

Now, the challenge for us is figuring out how do we create an economy that doesn't go through these wild boom and bust cycles. How can we create sustained growth? How can we make sure that we've laid the foundations for a competitive America in the 21st century, just like the foundation was laid for the "American Century," the 20th century?

And in that process, there are going to be some critical decisions that we're going to have to make. Are we willing to invest in the education of our young people so that we can develop the science and engineering and technology and mathematical skills that keep us at the cutting edge? We're not going to get that for free. It's not just going to be a matter of money; it's also going to be a matter of reform. But we've got to have a sense of urgency about how we pick up the pace in our schools. We're going to have to have an entirely new approach to energy, not just because of climate change and the environment, not just because of our addiction to foreign oil that ends up having us send billions of dollars overseas, but also because it is putting us at a huge competitive disadvantage.

We're going to have to fix our health care system. We're in the midst of a major debate about health care. And if you are a liberal, then you're concerned about making sure that 30 million American citizens get coverage. If you're moderate and not all that interested in politics, you should still be concerned about the fact that your health care is less secure and less stable than it has ever been. And if you're a conservative, then you should know that the only thing that is going to allow us to close the structural deficit that we have that is piling on debt for our children and our grandchildren is if we are able to bend the cost curve and reduce the cost of health care inflation over the next 20, 30 years. If we don't do that, there's no way for us to balance our budget. There's so much at stake in fixing our health care system.

Now, this is before we start getting into foreign policy and the decisions we're going to have to make in terms of how we project our power effectively. How do we balance diplomacy and our military might in an intelligent way so that we're serving the national security interests of the American people? How do we make sure that we preserve our civil liberties even in the midst of going aggressively after those who would try to do us harm? How do we affirm our constitutional values at a time when the country is becoming more diverse? That can lead to incredible dynamism. That's always been a source of strength for America, but it can also lead to contentiousness and conflict and strife.

On each and every one of these questions, the Presidency can only take you so far. I've got a clear sense of where we need to go, and I'm absolutely convinced that if we make the right decisions right now and we battle through some difficult choices and we're willing to make some sacrifices, that we are going to be able to lay that foundation for the next generation.

But the President can't do it alone. Every single issue that I just mentioned, I've got to have effective, tough partners with integrity and vision, who feel accountable not to special

interests in Washington but feel accountable to the folks who sent him there. That's the kind of Senator you've got in Bob Casey. That's the kind of Senator that you have had for many years and you need to continue to have in Arlen Specter.

And that's why I'm here today. I'm here today because I'm going to need all of you to redouble your efforts in the months to come to fight for Arlen, because he's fighting for you, and he's fighting for what's right. And it's not going to be easy. It's not easy because we live in a polarized environment, and politics has become sport, and it's hard to sustain complex arguments about why we have to make choices that don't always seem real attractive on the surface. And so that creates political vulnerabilities for all of us. And all of you who know better, who know why it's so important for us to make these tough decisions, you've got to make sure that you support somebody who's got the savvy and the intelligence and the tenacity to actually get things done.

That's who Arlen Specter is. I'm proud to call him a friend. I am glad that he is in the Senate. And I'm going to keep on needing him in the Senate in the years to come. So I hope that all of you work as hard as you can. If you do, then I'm absolutely confident that we're going to get through these tough times and brighter days are going to be ahead not just for Pennsylvania, but for the United States of America.

So thank you so much for being here, everybody. God bless you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:26 p.m. at the Pennsylvania Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to David L. Cohen, executive vice president, Comcast Corporation.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Senator Arlen Specter, reception in Philadelphia, PA.

Locations: Philadelphia, PA.

Names: Casey, Robert P., Jr.; Cohen, David L.; Specter, Arlen.

Subjects: Budget, Federal : Deficit; Business and industry : Credit freeze situation; Economy, national : American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Reform legislation, proposed; Education : Science and math programs; Education : Standards and school accountability; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment insurance; Energy : Foreign sources; Environment : Climate change ; Health and medical care : Cost control reforms; Pennsylvania : Democratic Party events; Pennsylvania : President's visits; Taxation : Tax relief.

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